

# Delaware State Parks Wins National Competition for Excellence

Gov. John Carney announced Tuesday that Delaware State Parks won the prestigious 2021 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management, which Delaware also won in 2015. The award is given by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration with the National Recreation and Park Association. Pictured with the 2021 Gold Medal Grand Plaque, from left to right, are the Delaware State Parks staff who worked on the award application: Shauna McVey, public information officer; Joe Ulrich, photography/videography manager; Laura Parks, land preservation technician; Martina Adams, special project coordinator; and Elena Stewart, land preservation specialist; and DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin, DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation Director Ray Bivens; Gov. Carney; along with Parks section leaders Greg Abbott, manager of Administrative Services; Matt Ritter, manager of Planning, Preservation and Development; and Grant Melville, manager of Operations, Maintenance and Programming; and DNREC Deputy Secretary Lisa Borin Ogden. DNREC photo.

Gov. John Carney joined Delaware [Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control](#) Secretary Shawn M. Garvin today to announce that DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation has won the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA) and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) 2021 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management. This is the second time Delaware's state parks received this prestigious award, having won it previously in 2015.

In May, Delaware, Ohio, Tennessee and Texas state parks systems were selected as finalists in the State Parks Division. This biennial Gold Medal award has only been given

13 times since its establishment in 1997. Delaware and Florida are the only state park systems to win the award more than once.

“To be awarded the National Gold Medal is a testament to the dedication of the Division of Parks and Recreation and our state’s natural and cultural resources,” said Governor Carney. “Delaware State Parks provide refuge for millions of Delawareans and visitors each year, and were critical to the public’s mental and physical health as we navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. Congratulations to the Division on this well-deserved national honor.”

“Our entire state is incredibly proud of this significant national recognition of Delaware’s first class park system,” Secretary Garvin said. “I get the opportunity to see daily that the passion, dedication and commitment of the Division of Parks and Recreation team (staff, volunteers and partners) that is second to none in stewardship of our award-winning state parks.”

This year is also the 70th anniversary of Delaware State Parks. The division does not know the exact factors that set Delaware apart in the competition, but believes multiple items played into being selected as the 2021 Gold Medal state park system. Under the leadership of Director Ray Bivens, the Delaware State Parks system has seen tremendous growth and broken records in numerous areas, including camping/cabin stays, volunteer hours, park attendance and revenue. Bivens, named Delaware’s eighth state park director in 2013, received the 2021 National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) Conference Distinguished Service Award Sept. 10 during the NASPD’s annual conference. Other distinctions that undoubtedly contributed to the Gold Medal recognition include:

- Delaware State Parks welcomes more than 6 million guests annually and has seen record breaking growth during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, campground nights booked

grew by 57% from 70,880 nights in 2012 to 111,376 nights in 2020.

- The division is committed to innovation, including creative public private partnerships such as the Fort Miles Museum, Big Chill Beach Club and the establishment of Auburn Valley State Park from one of the most contaminated and flood-prone sites in the state.
- The division's impact on the economy includes support for more than 6,000 jobs through concessionaire and partnership agreements.
- The economic impact of visitors to the state includes \$319 million in spending generated from Cape Henlopen, Killens Pond, Lums Pond, Delaware Seashore and Trap Pond state park campgrounds.
- Despite being 20 times smaller than any other finalist state, Delaware boasts a diverse and robust state park system featuring ocean parks like Fenwick, Delaware Seashore and Cape Henlopen, urban parks such as Wilmington, Alapocas and Bellevue, historic parks such as Fort Delaware and First State Heritage Park and a variety of other amenities including Deerfield and Garrison's Lake golf courses, Brandywine Zoo, Killens Water Park and the Indian River Marina.

"Our 2021 Gold Medal recipients show a remarkable resilience as well concern for their constituents and staff in continuing to provide critical services during this COVID pandemic," said AAPRA Executive Director Jane H. Adams. "The pandemic has shed light on the essential services provided by park and recreation agencies."

Agencies are judged on their ability to address the needs of those they serve through the collective energies of community members, staff members and elected officials. The National Gold Medal Awards program, sponsored by Musco Lighting, LLC, honors communities in the United States that demonstrate excellence in parks and recreation through long-range

planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development, professional development and agency recognition.

The award is given in coordination by the AAPRA with the National Recreation and Park Association. To learn more about the Gold Medal Awards, visit [www.aapra.org](http://www.aapra.org).

Additional photos are available for download and publication at [this link](#).

#### **About DNREC**

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control protects and manages the state's natural resources, protects public health, provides outdoor recreational opportunities and educates Delawareans about the environment. The DNREC [Division of Parks and Recreation](#) oversees more than 26,000 acres in 17 state parks and the Brandywine Zoo. For more information, visit the [website](#) and connect with @DelawareDNREC on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

**Media Contacts:** Shauna McVey, [shauna.mcvey@delaware.gov](mailto:shauna.mcvey@delaware.gov) or Michael Globetti, [michael.globetti@delaware.gov](mailto:michael.globetti@delaware.gov).

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